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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [TD](#)
SUBJECT: T&T'S UNC FRACTURING; PANDAY "ENFORCES" UNITY

¶1. (U) Trinidad and Tobago's opposition United National Congress (UNC) is increasingly in disarray. On February 10, Leader of the Opposition Basdeo Panday fired Senator Robin Montano, allegedly because he discussed internal party matters publicly. Montano strongly opposed Panday's apparent intention to readmit former UNC member Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj. Montano initially made a motion at an executive meeting, and went public with his reservations about Maharaj after his motion went nowhere. Montano's removal sparked an acrimonious war of words, with a significant minority of UNC senators and MPs expressing their support for Montano. UNC Senator Roy Augustus went so far as to resign due to the "viciousness emanating from certain members of the national executive." After Augustus quit, Panday said publicly that he was ready to accept any resignations that are offered.

¶2. (U) Maharaj was Attorney General from 1995-2000 during the UNC government. He exited the party in 2000, citing massive UNC corruption. Two UNC MPs followed suit. Their departure cost the UNC its majority in parliament, forcing Panday to call early elections, which resulted in the Peoples National Movement (PNM) gaining power. Many UNC members blame Maharaj for "destroying the party," and are outraged that he is apparently being considered for a senior position without even an apology for his previous actions causing the UNC to lose power. Letters to the editor in the major newspapers illustrate deep unease with Panday's tactics by the UNC's supporters in the population.

¶3. (U) UNC Political Leader, Winston Dookeran, has tried to play the role of conciliator within the party, but appears increasingly sidelined. Dookeran called for the February 19th rally, at which Maharaj is scheduled to speak, to be canceled, but was not at the meeting in which the party executive decided to proceed with the rally as planned. Panday is sticking to the story that he invited Maharaj to speak due to his experience as Attorney General under the UNC, and his expertise in dealing with corruption. The rally's stated purpose is to "reveal the abuse of political power by the government."

¶4. (SBU) COMMENT: Ironically, "unity" has been Panday's clarion cry through the whole situation, thought it appears that he is intent on forcing out anyone who doesn't play by his rules. By insisting on bringing back the astute but divisive figure of Maharaj, Panday runs the risk of alienating most of the sitting UNC Members of Parliament. It seems that he is stirring up the party leadership to keep his deputies fighting among themselves rather than focusing on the number one slot. Some speculate that, in light of

Panday's legal troubles, he would like Maharaj's superior legal expertise close to hand. If Dookeran, or another UNC MP, can prove that Panday no longer has the support of the majority of opposition parliamentarians, he could ask the President to appoint a new Leader of Opposition. Prime Minister Manning is certainly balancing disarray in the opposition against continued strong public dissatisfaction with the PNM's government, largely regarding the crime issue, in his calculus on calling elections before they are due in late 2007. END COMMENT.

AUSTIN